



AMPLEFORTH
ABBAY

Palm Sunday 2023

To hear

To acclaim

To yield up our spirit to God

This is what the Word of God has encouraged us to do today.

The prophet Isaiah reminded us:

“Each morning he wakes me to hear – to listen like a disciple.”

Paul encouraged us in the second reading:

“to acclaim Christ as Lord to the glory of God the father.”

Crucially we learnt from Jesus to: “yield up our Spirit to God.”

So much of the Gospels are taken up with this final week and that is as it should be because the whole of Jesus life was a prelude, a preparation for what would happen on that final journey to Jerusalem and Calvary– the final Passover that anointed us his followers as ‘Passover People’. The very purpose of the incarnation in which the Trinity stepped into our time and space, into our history, the taking on of our humanity all reached its dramatic climax in the precious hours from Thursday evening to Sunday morning. A journey which Paul highlights in Philippians today as a journey from eternity to eternity.

St Ephraim the Syrian a fourth Century theologian wrote:

“Death could not devour our Lord unless he possessed a body, neither could hell swallow him up unless he bore our flesh; and so he came in search of a chariot in which to ride to the underworld. This chariot was the body which he received from the virgin; in it he invaded death’s fortress, broke open its strongroom and scattered all its treasures”

Jesus did not come as some sweet-talking hippy, full of woke nonsense and whistling kumbaya! He was a warrior, fighting for us, binding the enemy and setting us free. We would do well to take to heart the words of Melito of Sardis a second century author who wrote that Jesus:

“...rose from the dead and cried aloud: “Who takes issue with me?...Who will contradict me?”

Only a fool, only a fool would take issue or contradict! Friends, this journey we have begun is not simply about Jesus – it is not an annual commemoration of a past event– this liturgy, these special days spell out clearly who we are and what Jesus came to do. Jesus is the divine mirror who reflects to us what it means to be fully human and fully alive. He reveals to us that we are a being created:

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All this is to be found in one single simple phrase in the Gospel of Matthew that we listened to before the blessing of palms. Jesus said to his disciples, “*Go into the village*” What would they do once they were there? They would immediately untether a donkey and the colt that was with her. If anyone questioned them, they were simply to say: “*The Master has need.*” Contained in these few words: *The Master has need*, is a significant guiding principle of the Christian life. It places the whole of our life, all our motivations, everything we do in the perspective of God. It brings into sharp contrast the truth that life is not about me, my plans, my desires, my theories, my likes, my dislikes etc. It is all about the Master and His needs, His plans, His desires, and His purposes, it’s all about Him.

St Benedict echoes this when he encourages his monks to “*Listen, my son to the teaching of the Master.*” That is our vocation, not just as monks. Through baptism we belong to Him, and our life only finds meaning and only makes sense when lived through, in and with Him. *The Master has need of you.* How amazing is that? Why would God have need of you or me? Listen to this sound teaching of St Irenaeus which at first glance contradicts that the master has need of us: “*In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve not because he needed them.*” Now that is the truth, God, in reality does not need us – we add nothing to his greatness, but here is the paradox, God does not need us, but he chooses to invite us to be partners, to enter communion, to be part of his great mission to get His world back, why? St Irenaeus goes on: “*...because he wanted to have someone on whom to bestow his blessing.*”

The Master has need of you - because he delights in you and wants to bless you. He wants to invite you into an encounter of love, a holy communion. He created you for communion/relationship and it is in that fraternal circle of loving communion that we find ourselves and find our meaning. Pope Benedict could not have put in more clearly:

“...man is a being that can become a brother and sister of Jesus Christ. He is a creature that can become one with Christ, in Him, with God himself; he is able to receive not only relationship, but unity.”

Called into this circle of communal love we participate in the life of the Trinity, in their eternal love affair and we become ‘en-fleshed purpose and life’ and so share in their mission of love.

What are we to hear - the call to love as God loves.

What do we acclaim – Jesus as love made flesh the human face of God who is love, the living encounter with mercy.

To what do we yield – to love, life and eternity that has been inscribed into our humanity.

The Master has need of you, because through you he becomes a living incarnate presence, you become a window through which others can see the communion, participation and the mission that has been entrusted to us. But like the donkey, we need to be untethered, set free, brought to an encounter with Jesus, so that we can surrender to him. Walk with Him in Hope.

Let me put flesh on this beautiful truth. The flesh that I want to highlight belongs to a small priest from Naples. You may never have heard of him, Fr Dolindo Ruotolo. He was born in Naples in 1882. From childhood he suffered from ill health and used to call himself 'Mary's little old man'. Weak in body he had a very good mind and worked tirelessly to bring others to Jesus, to walk with Christ and to radiate hope. He taught in seminaries and wrote many books. Many came to him for confession and spiritual advice. Padre Pio once asked a woman: "Why have come all this way to see me when you live next door to the saint of God Fr Dolindo?" His name 'Dolindo' meant one who suffers, and he certainly did, not only in body but from many false allegations.

For the last ten years he was completely paralyzed and lived in poverty but was a source of many healings during his life. He told people that when he died, they were to approach his tomb and knock three times and he would answer their prayers. I had the opportunity last September to visit the Church of San Giuseppe dei Vecchi e Immacolata di Lourdes to pray at his tomb. It was moving to see the people come resting their heads against the tomb, laying a very sick child upon it and all knocking three times.

Comforting those who were suffering was his everyday experience which never ended even when his own health was at stake. He prayed for everyone and suffered for everyone. He ate very little, and his clothes were poor, but nevertheless, he withstood cold and hunger and was seen walking barefoot in the snow because he had given his shoes to the poor. He was the subject of much jealousy from fellow priests who saw his holiness and the love that people had for him. For nearly twenty years he lived the way of the cross, because of the allegations that were falsely made and that brought about his suspension from saying Mass, hearing confessions and even from receiving holy communion. Yet he walked with Christ with hope in Communion, participation, mission.

Rumours were circulated about him and accusation of heresy, he was excluded from his religious congregation. His only solace was God. In prayer he felt strongly that Jesus said to him: "I need you to be ready to surrender yourself to me entirely, to walk with me and to mirror my hope." In the spirit of obedience, the Servant of God Fr Dolindo accepted all the pain, misunderstanding and jealousy. His patience and faith bore fruit and he was restored to ministry. His abiding message and example are surrender to God – trust in Him – enter communion and participate in the Trinity beautiful mission.

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This is the journey we are invited to take – the journey of surrender – trust - why? Because the Master has need of you.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

2 April 2023